



Interiorscape Hall of Fame



Richard Ott

2010 Plantscape Professional Inductee



For over 33 years, Dick has been an industry leader and has helped hundreds of landscapers. Dick likes to say that while he was born and raised in both upstate New York and Connecticut, he has spent the past 100 years of his life in Knoxville, Tennessee.

After serving our country in Viet Nam and being recognized for his heroism with two Bronze Stars, Dick went on to graduate from the University of Tennessee with an MBA in Marketing.

Exploring the job market following graduation, Dick found that a job with IBM would mean periodic moves all over the country, and if he went with Procter and Gamble he would spend the first two years counting jars of Jif Peanut Butter on grocery shelves. Then, one day while in Atlanta, he saw a guy carrying a plant into a building. He found out he was a “plantscaper” and Dick was intrigued. Plants had always been his passion and he began to consider making them his business. Dick went back to Knoxville and opened Botany Center and a plantscaper was born.

In the beginning, the company struggled but Dick was clever and dedicated, and by the mid 80s had opened a larger facility and had won numerous awards. He was even doing work across the whole country for several high-end chain restaurants long before anyone else did.

As his business continued to grow, Orkin came a calling and Dick sold Botany Center to them and became their Vice President of Training and National Operations. He worked with the ever growing number of Orkin Interior Plant Care branches all over the US, set up Training and Operations Programs and wrote a ton of training manuals.

Orkin later sold their Interior Division to Tru Green and Dick became Tru Green’s Director of Operations and Training. A few years later, Tru Green sold their Interior Division to Rentokil, he again, he fulfilled the same role for Rentokil.

At this point one might think that it would be time to slow down, but not for Dick. Ever the entrepreneur, he saw an opportunity and became involved at the ground level with another industry group, Symbiot. This venture evolved into ownership of the Symbiot Interiorscape

Network, which, today, is NIN, the National Interiorscape Network. NIN is a group of over 100 interiorscape companies from all over the US and Europe. It is this most recent venture that has given Dick the most joy of all. As head of NIN, he acts as consultant, sets up meetings, programs, and marketing vehicles for member companies. It is the power of the many.

Dick Ott's path over the past 30 plus years has covered the entire history of the industry. From his own company to each of the mega companies, four in all, to the present day and NIN, Dick has been a trailblazer and has put his stamp on our industry.

But this just speaks to his business history. Early on in his career Dick became involved with our industry's associations. He even helped found some of them as well serving on the Board of Directors for ALCA (al-kuh), IPA, and Plants At Work. He served on the ALCA board for over 32 years, invested in the ALCA Educational Fund with a donation of \$25,000, and served on every committee, task force, and as a founder and director of the Industry Growth Initiative, Plants At Work. Participation in associations is demanding and costly, and is Dick's way of giving back to the industry he loves.

During all these years Dick continued to serve a key role in the University of Tennessee's Horticultural Programs. Not only did he serve on their Development Committee but was a horticulture professor for 11 years teaching the next generation of interiorscapers.

His travels have taken Dick and his wife Suzanne all over the globe yet he still finds time to indulge in his favorite pastimes, skiing, fishing, gardening and relaxing with family.

Dick has been an acknowledged expert in our field for all these many years and has received Awards and Recognition, such as ALCA's Lifetime Leadership Award in 2003; he has written for Interior Business and was named one of the Top 10 who influences the Industry.

We welcome Dick as this year's Plantscaping Professional inductee to the 2010 Plantscape Hall of Fame.

