

MALLS & MAINSTREETS

Planterra from page 5B

tributes states that "it takes about 15 to 20 spider plants to clean and refresh the air in the average 1,800-square-foot home." That translates into a lot of spider plants in a 100,000-square-foot mall.

"At Somerset, we aimed to enhance the close relationship between architecture and landscape in our design," he said. "The display features an elegant ambience of architectural details as well as showing off the form, texture, and color of individual plants."

Jody Stevenson of Troy, a Somerset shopper, took a break from the clearance sales and bought a cup of coffee at Gloria Jean's. As she sipped the brew, she commented on the mall's award-winning horticulture: "The plants at Somerset are so elegant. Most of them are planted in cream-colored marble containers throughout the center. Purple chrysanthemums are everywhere. My favorite spot is here, above the rotunda, where those huge palm trees rise up to the skydome."

The 35-foot-tall palm trees are actually preserved palms from southern California, according to Pliska. "They look so real, I hate to give away the secret. However, all the other species of plant around the mall are very real and thriving."

Tropical plants sold today are hardy and healthy due to years of research and genetic engineering, Pliska said. His plants come from Hawaii and Florida and are grown under filters to get them ready for Michigan and indoor living.

Walking through Planterra's 20,000-square-foot of greenhouse on Drake, north of 14 Mile, is a tropical treat. Living sculptures reach to the steamy ceiling panes, and every type of moss and fern thrives below. Various varieties of palms and cacti flourish, taking off from mother plants and wandering up stone walls and down brick walkways. Pliska moves through the variegated aisles pinching off wilted leaves and peeling back dying stalks.

"Ours is a labor of love," he said of his 45-member staff. "Part of our job is maintaining and changing the plants that we put into offices, homes and shopping centers. Plants are a lot of work. They take a long time to get the lush look we love. Some of my older figs and ficuses are valued between \$1,600 and \$2,500."

In addition to interiorscaping The Somerset Collection in Troy, Planterra has greened-up The Galleria in Southfield, the Renaissance Center in Detroit, the First Center Office Plaza in Southfield and the Embassy Suites and Marriott hotels.

Pliska is passionate about what he calls "getting the word out."

"Florists and all plant people should be working to let people know that chemicals are part of our society and we can't get away from them, but plants can help reduce their dangers. Plants are healthy for people."

"I get a lot of satisfaction as a human being by making my living and knowing I'm helping people out."



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