Fresh Frontiers

Looking for new and better flowers? Look to California growers and shippers—and to their friends worldwide.

Text and photography by Bruce Wright

The atmosphere was dynamic and optimistic at this year's California Floral Convention—and that's good news for *everyone* in the flower business.

Sponsored every other year by the California Association of Flower Growers and Shippers (CalFlowers), the convention brings growers, shippers, and buyers together to learn and educate, connect and collaborate. This year's event, held in Monterey, California in late July, not only enjoyed a record attendance, it also reflected a

FRAGRANT WITH PROMISE
Though not yet available as a cut flower, eucomis—a.k.a. pineapple lilies or Aloha Lilies—tantalized those who saw it on the California Floral Convention grower tour. Aloha Lilies are long lasting both on the plant and as cut flowers. Bred and marketed by Golden State Bulb Growers as a pot plant, they come in tints of white, pink, and purple and bear a soft, tropical, coconut fragrance. The potted plants are miniatures; the original plants are so large as to be unwieldy as cut flowers, but Golden State breeder Brian Correiar holds out hope that an intermediate, cut-flower version may be available soon.
www.goldenstatebulb.com

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wider range of stakeholders than ever before. Participants came from all over the country and indeed, all over the world: they included important industry players from Miami, Colombia, and the Netherlands.

"We're still a California-based organization," says CalFlowers chief executive officer Michael LoBue. "But the mission is evolving to be less source-centric. We'll clasp hands with anyone who's got capital at risk to rise the tide that lifts all boats."

WORKING TOGETHER As an example Michael cites the Women's Day promotion co-sponsored earlier this year by CalFlowers and other U.S.-based organizations along with associations representing growers from Colombia and Ecuador.

Another example is the role played by CalFlowers in promoting a standardized, 40-inch box to make flower shipping more cost effective. "We've always been

CALIFORNIA GROWN Remarkable cut flowers from California, on display at the California Floral Convention Flower Fair and on the grower tour, included those on this and the following pages. Participants admired (clockwise from top) Gerrondo gerberas from Green Valley Floral, vivid asclepias from CamFlor, Rose Lilies from Sun Valley Floral Farms, and stephanotis on the vine from California Flower Shippers. **www.greenvalleyfloral.com; www.camflor.com; www.tsvg.com; www.californiaflowershippersinc.com**

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a transportation organization," not just a growers' organization, notes Mike Mooney of California grower-shipper Dramm & Echter, who currently sits on the CalFlowers board of directors.

Negotiated rates with FedEx and OnTrac are among the important benefits of CalFlowers membership, and a major reason why the association has an active associate (nonvoting) membership in 48 states. The negotiated rates expedite shipping of flowers from all over to wherever they need to go—including imported flowers out of Miami.

This year, CalFlowers began accepting out-of-state U.S. growers as members. And membership rules have been liberalized in other ways. In the past, wholesale buyers were theoretically required to maintain a sales ratio of 50 percent California-grown fresh product—a goal that was unrealistic and unverifiable.

Overall, CalFlowers has been shifting its

SOMETHING NEW Demand for spray roses has been increasing, confirms Janet Louie of Green Valley Floral—and no wonder, with varieties like those seen above: bright pink Mikuki, lavender Precious Moments, blush pink Pashmina, and peach Madame Butterfly. Also pictured are distinctive floral materials from CamFlor: eucalyptus pods, daisylike yellow rudbeckia Irish Eyes, and a new, hot-pink variety of foxglove called Illumination. **www.greenvalleyfloral.com; www.camflor.com**

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policies and priorities in a direction that reflects the needs of its members and the realities of today's global flower business. The result has been a more engaged membership and a higher profile for the association.

WORKING SMARTER The subtle changes don't take anything away from the respected role of California growers, who continue to innovate and set trends for the industry in terms of new crops, efficient and sustainable growing techniques, and ever-higher quality standards.

That was evident in two highlights of the California Floral Convention: the grower tours and the Flower Fair. Convention participants were awed by the quality and diversity of the cut-flower crops they saw. And on the day-long bus tour that took in five leading flower farms, the California growers demonstrated their resourcefulness in dealing with challenges common to flower growers the world over, including shortages of land, labor and

DOUBLE THE ROMANCE A second generation of double Oriental Rose Lilies is now on the market, with newer varieties on the way. For shipping, the use of nylon socks is preferred, as seen on one of the blooms in the photo above of Elena—on display from Flamingo Holland, which supplies lily bulbs to California growers such as Sun Valley and Dramm & Echter. Also on this page: cottage yarrow from CamFlor; the new bubblegum-pink David Austin garden rose, Carey, as grown by Green Valley Floral; yellow iris from Sun Valley; and a lovely pale green spray rose from California Pajarosa, Green Diosa. **www.flamingoholland.com; www.tsvg.com; www.drammechter.com; www.camflor.com; www.pajarosa.com; www.greenvalleyfloral.com**

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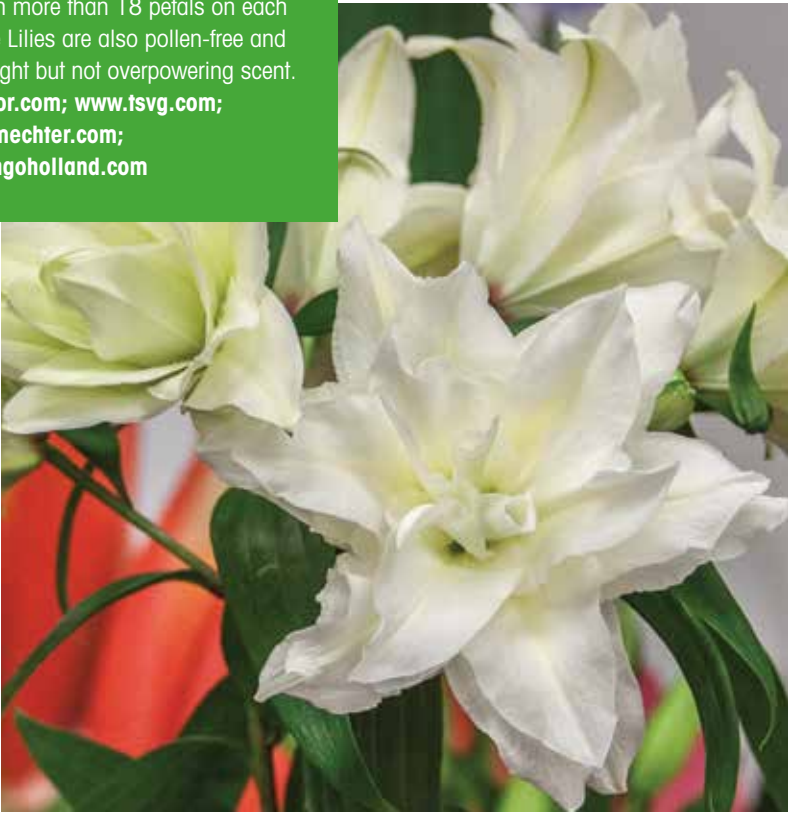
especially water.

"We use 40 percent less water than five years ago, before we started recycling it," notes Janet Louie of Green Valley Floral, where the water that passes through soil-free growing systems is recaptured, filtered, treated, tested for acidity and other factors, and reused. The technology and equipment for recycling is expensive but over time it actually pays for itself, because it recoups not only water but also fertilizer that would otherwise flow out to sea. Similar recycling programs are in place at California Pajarosa and Kitayama Brothers.

"The drought definitely poses a challenge," says Robert Kitayama, "but when you look at the return per gallon or acre-foot of water, California greenhouse growers like us are getting a very good return."

Flower farming in California de-



BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL Intriguing offerings on display in the well-stocked CamFlor coolers in late July included (from top) purple gomphrena, bristling orange echinacea pods, and delicately striped nigella pods with feathery green foliage. Below, another new Rose Lily on display from Flamingo Holland: Carolina, white with pale yellow at the center. Bred in Holland, Rose Lilies went into commercial production in the year 2000 with only two widely available varieties. Since then, about ten new and improved varieties have appeared on the market. With more than 18 petals on each flower, Rose Lilies are also pollen-free and possess a light but not overpowering scent. **www.camflor.com; www.tsvg.com; www.drammechter.com; www.flamingoholland.com**

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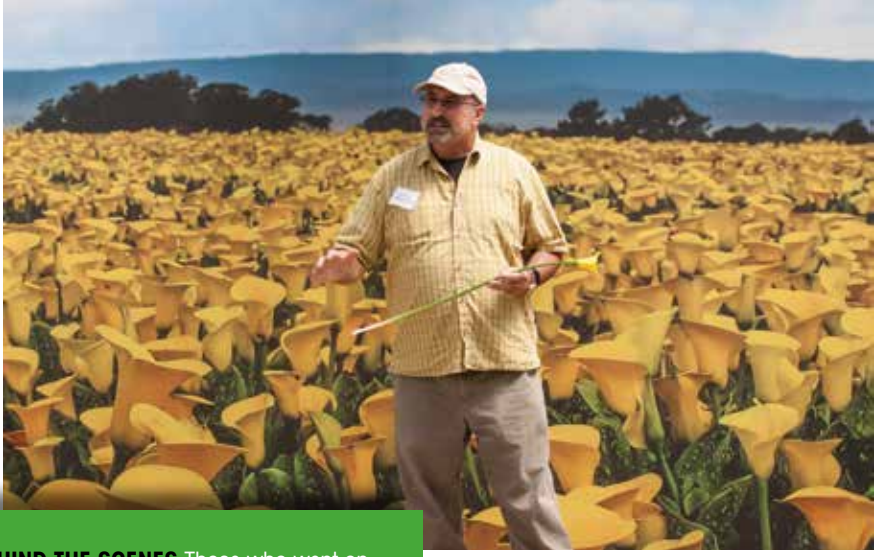
clined through the '90s and early 2000s, notes Robert. "Now, the weeding out has been done," he continues. "I think California growers have realized, if you want to compete, you have to have a really good product."

Indeed, the situation of U.S. growers and retail florists over the past several years runs parallel. Both have declined in number, but it's the strongest who have survived, leaving a lean and mean, high-performing group of businesses run by people who share a passion for their product.

Look to future issues of Flowers& for profiles of cut-flower growers from the Monterey area, along with other cut-flower news. For more about CalFlowers and its convention, visit the CalFlowers website: **www.cafgs.org**



BEHIND THE SCENES Those who went on the daylong grower tour visited five flower farms, including CallaCo, where breeder Brian Correiar (above) talked about calla breeding by CallaCo's parent company, Golden State Bulb Growers. Golden State is also known for tuberous begonias with extra-large and beautiful blooms (below)—short-lived as cut flowers but impressive in party work. At California Pajarosa (right), workers grade roses by hand, but with help from machines. In addition to greenhouses full of roses, Pajarosa has a field of Safari Sunset leucadendron (below). At CamFlor, custom-made garlands (below left) provide a value-added product popular with CamFlor customers. **www.goldenstatebulb.com; www.callaco.com; www.pajarosa.com; www.camflor.com**