



Interiorscape Hall of Fame



Paul Ecke, Jr.

2006 Posthumous Inductee



The poinsettia and the name Ecke are almost synonymous. And while we can not induct this well known plant into the Interiorscape Hall of Fame, we can induct that individual who is almost solely responsible for its popularity in the world today. Accordingly, we honor Paul Ecke Jr. as the 2006 Posthumous inductee into the Interiorscape Hall of Fame.

Paul is known for his outstanding work with poinsettias and also his involvement within the industry and various community organizations.

While both he and his father, Paul Sr., played major roles in bringing this interiorscape mainstay into the limelight, it was Paul Jr. who is responsible for its production as a greenhouse plant and marketing it as a necessary holiday addition to homes and buildings throughout the world. Today 75% of all poinsettias grown in North America, and 50% grown in the world get their start at the Paul Ecke Ranch.

Paul Jr. was born into the poinsettia business. From the age of 10, he worked after school and on weekends in the poinsettia fields and packing sheds owned by his father. Following a stint in the military, Paul Jr. earned his degree in horticulture from the Ohio State University in 1949 ... the year he always considered as his "formal entry" into the family business.

From 1923 until 1963 the Ecke Ranch was field-growing stock poinsettia plants on hundreds of acres in Encinitas, CA. All that changed in 1963. Developments in poinsettia breeding yielded the first commercial-quality cultivars that grew best as potted plants.

With formal training in horticulture from the Ohio State University, Paul Jr. recognized the advantages of changing the nature of the business and encouraged his father to move toward greenhouse culture. Though skeptical of such a radical change, Paul Sr. agreed, and the family began building greenhouses. By the mid-1960s, most of the ranch's commercial growing operations had shifted from the field to the greenhouse.

Using his training from Ohio State, Paul Jr. was responsible for the development and hybridization of many forms and types of poinsettias we have today. His constant hybridization and introduction of new varieties produced plants with new, unique colors and shapes, and made it easier for interiorscapers to design, and equally important sell, new looks for their annual holiday installations.

Rather than shipping large, dormant mother plants via rail car, the ranch could now ship much smaller poinsettia cuttings via air freight. This new transportation method, when combined with the conversion in propagation methodology was so dramatic that it completely changed the nature of the business forever, and the ranch business took on a more international scope.

By this time, Paul Sr. had turned over most of the day to day operations of running the business and visiting other grower customers to Paul Jr.

Paul Jr. recognized that greenhouse production alone would not sustain the company. His vision of the poinsettia plant's future propelled his efforts, and he worked tirelessly to keep the plant before the public.

Through media placements, television and print promotions, he made certain that poinsettias became a ubiquitous part of the holiday experience. No holiday scene could be considered complete without at least one poinsettia in it. The ranch worked with television, such as the Tonight Show and the Bob Hope Christmas Specials, to make certain that poinsettias were always a part of the holiday sets. This constant effort paid off: poinsettias today are as much a part of the holiday season as evergreens and carols. His marketing efforts are a major reason why holiday season installations are responsible for a major portion of many interiorscape companies' annual revenue.

He was a hands-on man, regularly visiting customers in the U.S. and Europe always listening, learning and sharing new methods and ideas. To address the concerns of interiorscapers needing to extend the plant's seasonal shelf life, the Ecke Ranch's introduction of 3 plants to a pot, as opposed to a single branched plant, met a much needed design requirement, while the introduction of the sturdier plants like the "Everlasting Star" saved interiorscaper's money on plant replacements.

He was also a frequent speaker and lecturer at universities, growers' conventions and seminars - anywhere industry people gathered.

Paul Jr. also spent countless hours, and seemingly limitless energy, participating in - and leading - many local, state and national floral associations. His involvement with the D.C. Kiplinger Chair at his alma mater resulted in state of the art post-production guides. His industry commitment was demonstrated time and time again with such groups as the California State Florists Association the Society of American Florists, and the American Floral Endowment, earning him a reputation as a leader with extraordinary vision and foresight. One crowning achievement may be his three decades of work in the development of the Ohio Florists International Short Course, where he lectured many times, and which honored him by dedicating the 1993 Short Course to his tireless and unwavering service. He also was a leader in non-industry organizations, serving on local and national Board of Directors of the YMCA.

In 1991, representing the culmination of a plan he had set in motion in the early 1970's, Paul Jr. turned over the management of the company to his son, Paul Ecke III.

Paul Ecke, Jr. with his tireless energy and vision has given the interiorscape industry the gift of a plant that comes in a myriad of lovely colors and shapes. In addition, his remarkable marketing efforts developed an exceptional, and perennial, market for interiorscape

services. In an interiorscaper's perfect world, each of the twenty plants that form the core of the interiorscape plant library, would have an innovator and advocate such as Paul Ecke Jr. We honor him tonight as an outstanding nurseryman and human being.

