



Interiorscape Hall of Fame



Richard Keeline "Dick" Wilcox 2001 Posthumous Inductee

Richard Keeline "Dick" Wilcox was born at his family's summer home in Spirt Lake, Iowa on August 27th, 1914 into a family of growers blessed with sage business acumen. By the early 1900's his grandfather, John Wilcox, had become the largest greenhouse grower west of the Mississippi, continuing in business until the early 1970's. In 1919, when Dick was 5, his father Roy Wilcox, left the family business (J.F. Wilcox & Sons) in Council Bluffs, Iowa and moved to California for health reasons. With the financial help of his father-in-law Oscar Keeline, Roy bought the Jacob Dietrich Nursery in Montebello which was growing roses and kentia palms. This became Roy F. Wilcox & Co. located on 65 acres in Montebello for nearly 30 years then in Santa Barbara for 20 years.

Dick went to high school (prep school) at Deane School in Santa Barbara (now Westmont College). He attended UCLA, and then UC Berkeley where he was president of his fraternity, Delta Tau Delta and met his wife, Jane. They were married in 1937 after he graduated from Berkeley with a Bachelor of Science. Dick believed in the value of associations and in volunteering. He maintained Keeline Wilcox's membership in the California Association of Nurserymen, and in the American Association of Nurserymen. The company has been an active member of both associations for over 50 years. Dick was one of the founding members and the Charter President of the Brea Chapter of Rotary International.

While at Berkeley Dick studied with, and became a life-long friend of Thomas Church, one of the most renown and influential landscape architects of the 20th Century. It was this association that formed some of Dick's most basic philosophies about land use and man's interaction with nature. In the 30's many large estates were being subdivided and suburbia was being born. Tommy Church believed that a house should be sited so it fit 'into the continuity of the land'. Church felt the garden should be an extension of the house, an outdoor room. He said the house should blend 'so gradually with its garden...that it is hard to know where one ends and the other begins'. Dick, having been raised surrounded by foliage and flowers, very much agreed with Tommy. Dick approached the same idea from the other side. He felt not only should the garden be an extension of the house but also that it was important that the house should also be an extension of the garden. He felt that one should flow into the other. Dick was one of the first 100 licensed landscape architects in California. His first job was as Resident Landscape Architect for the Kent family in Marin County. He was instrumental in the design and development of Kent Woodlands, riding his horse over the rough terrain to site the roads. He loved that work, but family was more important and in 1940 he moved back to Southern California to work in the family business with his father.

It was 1946 when Dick and his brother Toby, left Roy F. Wilcox & Co. to found their own company. With the financial help of their grandfather, Oscar Keeline, Keeline

Wilcox Nurseries was born and began shipping kentias nationwide by train and air. Keeline Wilcox also acquired the kentia palm business and the general nursery business from Roy and in the early 50's bought Basset & Washburn Kentia Nurseries, Inc. While their father Roy focused on flowers and predominantly small foliage, Dick focused on larger size plant material - growing and marketing kentias for interior use and specimen trees for interior and exterior use. From that time on, the Wilcox family has been the major grower of kentia palms in the continental United States.

However, a problem arose in the 1950's, with the growth of Southern California came the growth of smog. By 1957 Dick had to acknowledge noticeable deterioration in the quality of his kentias. That same year, with the assistance of the Soil & Plant Laboratory and the University of California Riverside, the diagnosis was made: 'death by smog'. The Keeline Wilcox kentia inventory was sold to Roy F. Wilcox & Co. and at this time, an exclusive marketing agreement was established with them. In addition to kentias, aspidistra, corynocarpus, interior-acclimated ficus, Keeline Wilcox went on to grow raphis, four varieties of dracaenas, schefflera, and tupidanthus. The kentias thrived on the bluffs of Santa Barbara until Roy's death in 1969 and the subsequent closing of his company.

Roy's inventory was then for sale, and Dick's decision to repurchase the kentia business and expand Keeline Wilcox's production of interior foliage was an important contributing factor to the formalization of interiorscaping as an industry. This expansion provided much of the foliage necessary to an industry just being born and in need of a reliable source of quality foliage. By the time the palms physically returned to Keeline Wilcox in 1972, a renewed marketing effort and expansion had begun. It was clear the demand for interior foliage would continue to grow.

There was no such thing as an interiorscape industry for much of Dick Wilcox's life and he was a pioneer in recognizing that the interior use of plants and their maintenance would become an 'industry'. Under his direction, growing and marketing interior foliage became a major part of Keeline Wilcox's business and directly led to hosting a meeting of interiorscapers in 1984, which would evolve into the Professional Interior Plantscape Association (PIPA). PIPA would eventually merge with the other regional associations to become the California Interior Plantscape Association (CIPA).

Dick retired from day-to-day involvement with Keeline Wilcox in 1985 but reassumed active management May 1989. He died shortly thereafter, in June 1989. Because of Dick's dedication to quality and his perseverance in overcoming challenges, his early recognition of and commitment to supply the foliage needs of the budding interiorscape industry, and his support of the industry associations in their early stages of growth, Richard Keeline "Dick" Wilcox is truly one of the pioneers of interiorscaping.

