

NEW GREENHOUSES FANTASTIC..... 2

LIFESTYLE
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Imagine trading in a rusty DeSoto for a gleaming new Lexus and you'll pretty much know how Karen Daubman, director of horticulture at Phipps Conservatory and Botanic Garden, feels just about now.

When she and her staff moved into their new production greenhouses recently, they went from dirt floors to heated concrete. From leaking panes of glass and spotty temperature control to a mechanized roof that can be opened or shuttered to the weather when necessary. From stationary aisles to space-saving rolling benches.

While the rest of the renovation of the historic glasshouses has been done with an eye toward keeping the buildings true to their architectural identity, the production houses were built looking firmly to the future.

Nobody is complaining, especially not Ms. Daubman, 30, a Rhode Island native who holds degrees in landscape architecture and urban horticulture and a master's in public horticulture. She and her talented growers are no longer shackled by the outdated greenhouses, which she believes were constructed in the 1930s.

With their new digs, they have the ability not only to rebuild some of the existing collections but also to spread their wings and try new things. The energy and excitement in the place are palpable.

Right now, the production houses are filled with plants that are being installed in the new tropical forest scheduled to open Dec. 9.

Once the tropicals are out, the crew can get cracking on all kinds of interesting projects, from updating the orchid collection to trying new and different plants for upcoming shows, things like blooming desert plants and Australian and African bulbs.

Right now, the conservatory grows much of what is on display during the seasonal shows.

"We grew 100 percent of the fall show," says Ms. Daubman.

For the upcoming winter show, they have outsourced the poinsettias because they take up lots of space and are an easy crop to grow. The growers they contract with will grow the plants to exact specifications. Trickier plants are kept in-house.

"We like to grow the specialty items ourselves," she says.

With the new greenhouses, that will become lots easier because specific plant needs will be easier to meet.

The rolling benches mean there needs to be space for only one walking aisle. Tepid water is available for watering. In hot weather, automatic ceiling vents keep the houses the same temperature as the outside. In the winter, energy blankets in the ceilings keep the heat in.

Also on hand are black-out clothes that can help re-create shorter days; bulb coolers in the basement; a **fog system** to cool plants in the summer and provide extra humidity for orchids and other crops that require it; and a fertilizer injector that can be used in all of the houses.

Staffers now have space by the loading dock to quarantine plants that come in from nurseries all over the country. And their extra greenhouse space makes it possible for them to trade plants with other institutions around the country.

"There's quite a lot of [trading] lists that come out," says Ms. Daubman. "We didn't have the space before to take advantage of that."

The new houses are also higher, allowing them to grow bigger trees or substitute plants into displays

when they are at their peak.

"It's a whole new world," says Ms. Daubman. "It's fantastic. We are thrilled."

PHOTO; Caption: PHOTO: Robin Rombach/Post-Gazette: Megan Fifarek pots vinca in the new greenhouses at Phipps Conservatory.

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