

Local florists go Dutch, see flowers everywhere

BY STEPHANIE O'HANLEY

They went to buy giftware, but the flower culture of the Netherlands also left a big impression on Christine and Lauren Pickrell of Westmount Florist.

The two florists recently posted an account on Westmount Florist's blog of the flowers they saw during their January trip.

Lauren said the five-day business trip came about after her uncle happened to meet a giftware wholesaler during a visit.

"When he came back he said, 'Oh my God Christine, you and Lauren should go over there and buy some stuff from this wholesaler,'" explained Christine, who is Lauren's aunt.

"We brought in two containers, shipped over 20-foot containers just packed with giftware," said Christine. More shipments of the giftware, which includes outdoor planters, pots, vases and decorative items

will arrive in coming months. "We're the only people they sell to in Canada."

"We're redoing the entire store right now," said Lauren. "It's beautiful stuff. I am very excited about one piece. It's like a stag head, a beautiful silver stag head.

First trip to the Netherlands

While flowers are the Pickrells' family business, the trip marked the first time either Christine or Lauren had ever been to the Netherlands. While they stayed in Amsterdam, they also visited Aalsmeer to see the world's largest flower auction.

"It actually is the same size as 25 football fields," said Christine. "Lauren found out that up until last year it was the largest building in the world." Pointing to a photo of a room with rows of traders sitting at computers, Christine said, "This is the auction, so you see people have their computers and you bid on flowers. It's very fast. They come on these carts and it's really something to see."

"In Aalsmeer, one of the guys that we were dealing with was saying every single

person is affected by the flower industry somehow, whether it's someone that's working at the auction or someone who grows [them] or someone who works at a soil place, everywhere everyone's affected by it," said Lauren.

Christine, who has been a florist for 30 years, said the two enjoyed meeting an orchid grower who supplies orchids for the Grammys. "He does all the big shows like the Academy Awards, they have a thousand of (orchids) from this guy. He supplied a big Christian Dior fashion show a few years ago," she said.

Flowers 'everywhere'

Christine said they saw flowers "everywhere" in the Netherlands. "Because it was the wintertime, there weren't obviously a lot of flowers outside, but we were surprised at how many there were." She pointed to a photo of a container of flowers they saw "in the middle of the street, in front of a restaurant" and to another photo of flowers on a table at the Van Gogh Museum's restaurant. "You don't go to our museum here and see that," she said.

Pointing to another photo of a shop carrying all sorts of colourful flowers," Christine said, "This is just a little cash-and-carry place and it's huge. You walk along the street here and most florists don't even have that variety."

"Here, as sad as it is, if you put a really nice plant outside your building, outside your restaurant or whatever, chances are it's going to get destroyed," said Lauren. "Some person is going to push it over, rip out the flowers. In Holland ... you could just leave a plant outside, no one will touch it. It's amazing."

While Christine said from what she saw in Amsterdam, "everyone has flowers in some kind of vase somewhere," she said Montreal also has a flower culture. "Montreal is a very European city. We have lots of customers who have flowers every



Christine Pickrell at a cash-and-carry shop.

week or they go to someone's house for dinner. It's a big industry here, more so than a lot of places in the States."

In 50 years of business, Westmount Florist has established relationships with companies in the Netherlands and receives flowers from the Netherlands three times a week, Christine said.

Lauren, who has been a florist for 10 years, said Dutch flower growers told her about what flowers go through before they arrive in North America.

"I asked one of the guys: 'How long does it take when the flower is cut and then in our store?' and he said it's about 36 hours," she said. "So literally it's cut, it's packaged, it's boxed, it's flown over and it's in our store right away. We're able to do that."

Workers ticketed

A contractor at 345 Victoria was issued a ticket for \$1,250 February 27 for occupying the street and sidewalk without a valid permit, Public Security officials said. The Public Works permit that had been obtained allowed workers to occupy only the space of two parking meters. Instead the workers were found at 8:17 am to have blocked one lane on the street as well as the sidewalk.



Lauren Pickrell, a flower in hand.

Photos courtesy of C. Pickrell.

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