



TONY DOLDES • Green Treescapes photos

Great heights: Dennis Gabriek, perched among the Preserved Treescapes palms he sells around the world, expects to gross \$6.5 million this year.

Faux palms

Firm has the look of mother nature

By Penni Crabtree

PHOTO BY TONY DOLDES

Dennis Gabriek remembers a time when his was a voice crying in a very peculiar wilderness — an unlikely patch of preserved palm trees and replica shrubbery.

"The initial response we got was, 'You want to sell me what — a pickled tree, an embalmed palm?'" recalls Gabriek, president and CEO of Preserved Treescapes International, a manufacturer of preserved and replica greenery.

"For a long time we really had to be convin-

gists, getting out there and telling our story."

These days there's no lack of PTI converts. The company's preserved palm trees and assortment of replica greenery can be found in hotels in London, golf courses in Japan and shopping malls in Iceland.

Clients of the Occochee company include such notables as the Planet Hollywood restaurant chain, which incorporates PTI greenery in all restaurant designs, and the The Mirage Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, which features 300 preserved palm trees in its famed lobby atrium.

So how "real" does PTI's assortment of faux greenery look?

Very real indeed, and while Gabriek concedes his trees wouldn't fool Mother Nature, he likes to think they make her a little nervous.

PTI's most popular product, preserved palm trees, are made largely of the stuff of real palm trees. Live palm fronds are harvested from palm trees and treated with a nontoxic preservative for seven to 10 days. The leaves exchange their fluid with the preservative, then are stored several weeks to ensure the process was successful.

A faux trunk is designed from fiberglass, steel or other materials, and covered with real palm bark, and the preserved fronds



QUICK AUDIT

- **Company:** Preserved Treescapes International
- **Business:** Preserved and replicated trees
- **President:** Dennis Gabriek
- **Headquarters:** Occochee
- **Employees:** 15
- **1995 gross revenue:** \$5 million



Cutting edge: Mike Burley cuts steel supports for the preserved palm fronds.

are then set into the trunk.

Palm tree sizes range from 7 to 60 feet, and can cost anywhere from \$125 to \$300 per linear foot.

The cost pencils out comparable to, or a little higher than, a live palm, Gabriek said. But savings are found when ease of installation, maintenance, freedom from disease, and longevity are calculated.

In addition, developers often realize other savings when they choose faux over real.

One commercial development trimmed \$4 million from its budget when it replaced 12 live palms with preserved palms, cutting the need for heavy, load-bearing capacity flooring, drainage areas and water-

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PTI

Nothing unreal about firm's annual growth

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ing systems, heating requirements and skylights, Gabriek said.

Roger Voettiere, a spokesman for Lifescapes International, a landscape architectural firm in Newport Beach, said preserved greenery is gaining increasing acceptance in the landscape and commercial development industries.

"We'd never used preserved trees prior to 1989, but since then we've used PTI quite a lot," said Voettiere, whose firm did the landscape design for the Mirage. "There are just a lot of places to preserved and replica trees. You don't have to worry about them dying, they require less maintenance, and they don't grow out of the space you've designed for

them."

Such industry acceptance has been won in large part by PTI's savvy and tenacious marketing. Gabriek said he knew little about landscape architecture or greenery when he got in the business in the 1980s, but he always knew about salesmanship.

The seeds for PTI were planted in 1981, when Gabriek, a former salesman in Santa Barbara for a Swedish book equipment firm, met Per Moore, a Swedish inventor who had devised a formula for preserving flowers.

Gabriek was intrigued by the idea, and the two men quickly struck up a friendship. By 1984, the friendship turned into a partnership, and Gabriek left his job to co-found Nature Preserved of California.

At first the company concentrated on the floral industry, preserving flowers and foliage. Then one day a client asked the company to preserve an entire tree, and Gabriek saw the possibility for an untapped market.

"I went to the library and researched the interior landscape industry, picked the top firms, then made appointments and called on them with samples," said Gabriek. "Gradually we shifted our focus on trees, and ruled the concept out across the U.S."

Back at the Santa Barbara headquarters, however, there were deep divisions about how the company should grow. Gabriek wanted to increase the sales force and aggressively pursue overseas markets — others in the company had other notions.

In frustration, Gabriek left Nature Preserved in 1991, moved to Carlsbad, and started PTI.

The company took root, flourished and, within a year, bought out Nature Preserved. Sales offices sprouted in Illinois, England, Thailand and New South Wales. And, in 1994, Gabriek transplanted PTI to

a 40,000-square-foot facility in Occochee.

As PTI grew, so did its revenues — from initial sales of \$300,000 in 1991, to \$5 million in 1995. This year, the company is expected to gross \$6.5 million.

Gabriek said the company's success is due in large part to a simple, unavoidable fact of nature.

"Anyone you take a living tree and put it inside a building, it is a fight — it doesn't want to be there," Gabriek said. "The industry standard is that about one-third die the first year, and those that find a happy spot will eventually grow too much."

"Our approach is that we are here to help, not to replace. We work with landscape architects and developers to help them incorporate preserved and replica trees with the real thing in a way that's both beautiful and cost-efficient."

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