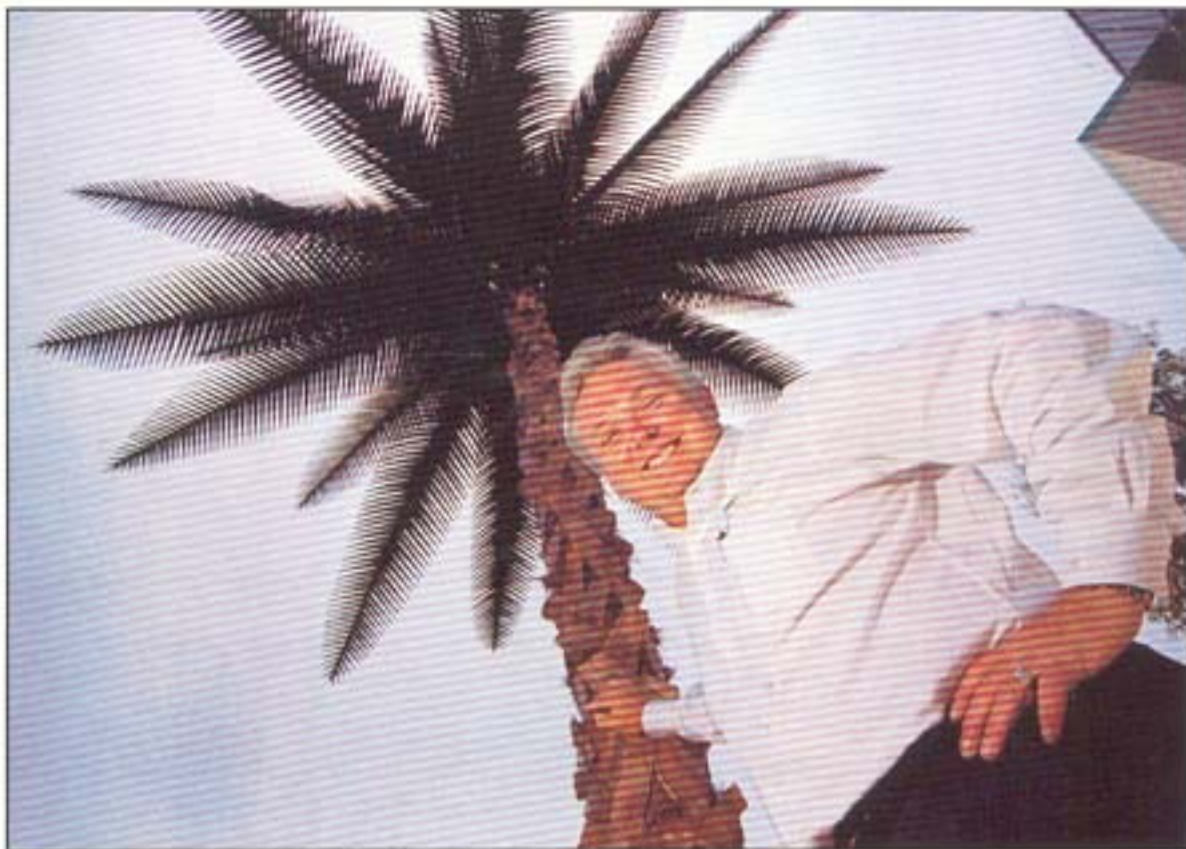


The San Diego  
**Union-Tribune.**

**Business**



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

**By Penni Crabtree**  
SPECIAL TO THE UNION-TRIBUNE

**D**ennis Gabrick 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 Gabrick, president and CEO of Preserved TreeScapes International, a manufacturer of

preserved and replica greenery.

"For a long time we really had to be evangelists, 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 Oceanside company include such notables as the Planet Hollywood restaurant chain, which incorporates PTI greenery in

**QUICK AUDIT**

- **Company:** Preserved TreeScapes International
- **Business:** Preserved and replicated trees
- **President:** Dennis Gabrick
- **Headquarters:** Oceanside
- **Employees:** 35
- **1995 gross revenues:** \$5 million

**Faux palms**

*Firm has the look of mother nature*

# PTI

## Nothing unreal about firm's annual growth

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 Gabrick 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 are then set into the trunk.

Palm tree sizes range from 3 to 66 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, Gabrick 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, cut-

ting the need for heavy, load-bearing capacity flooring, drainage areas and watering systems, heating requirements and skylights, Gabrick said.

Roger Voettiner, 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 Voettiner, whose firm did the landscape design for the Mirage. "There are just a lot of pluses 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. Gabrick 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 Gabrick, a former salesman in Santa Barbara for a Swedish bank equipment firm, met Per Monie, a Swedish inventor who had devised a formula for preserving flowers.

Gabrick was intrigued by the idea, and the two men quickly struck up a friendship. By 1984, the friendship turned into a partnership, and Gabrick 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 Gabrick 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 Gabrick. "Gradually we shifted our focus on trees, and rolled the concept out across the U.S."

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

In frustration, Gabrick 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 Gabrick transplanted PTI to a 40,000 square foot facility in Oceanside.

As PIT 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.

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

"Anytime you take a living tree and put it inside a building, it is a fight — it doesn't want to be there," Gabrick 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."