‘Jiuhbao Sweetie’ hits all the right notes, elicits a chorus of praise and wins the 2010 Outstanding Varieties Competition.

Photos by Betsy Hansen
It’s no coincidence that the same week Christian Dior and Nina Ricci debuted cascading fuchsia frocks to enthusiastic reporters and fashionistas in Paris, a flower with those same characteristics also stirred up excitement during SAF’s Outstanding Varieties Competition in Orlando.

Amongst 238 cut flower and plant entries, ‘Jiuhbao Sweetie’, a phalaenopsis orchid from Transflora/DVFG, (pronounced ju-bâo) beguiled all nine judges, SAF Orlando 2010 attendees, hotel staff and guests at the Omni ChampionsGate to win the Best in Show top prize.

“This has the look that will marvel even the biggest diva,” said Jerome Raska, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, during the Winner’s Circle session at SAF Orlando 2010, offering his take on what set the most outstanding varieties apart. “And its petals have such thick tissue that it ships fantastically and has a vase life of more than 20 days,” said the co-owner of Blumz by...JRDesigns in Ferndale, Mich., and Detroit.

“This is a flower you can hang your hat on,” said Bill Schodowski, national business developer for Delaware Valley Floral Group in Sewell, N.J.

A bombshell as a bouquet (check out footage of Melissa McMillin and Jeremy Gebhardt’s nuptials on the “Today Show “ wedding Sept. 30) or lobby centerpiece (The Plaza Hotel and Waldorf Astoria are fans), ‘Jiuhbao Sweetie’ is “high-end all the way,” Schodowski said, adding that its exclusivity is an attribute to champion to customers.

Judge Carmen Cosentino, AAF, PFCI, summed up ‘Jiuhbao Sweetie’s’ elite status: “That’s a $400 bouquet all on its own,” said the owner of Cosentino’s Florist in Auburn, N.Y.

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**Best in Show—‘Jiuhbao Sweetie’ Phalaenopsis Orchid**

**TRANFSFLORA/DVFG**

**OUTSTANDING TRAITS**


Schodowski said fans will have to be patient: the fuchsia color is very scarce, with Transflora/Miami getting only 70-80 stems per week; in white, ‘Jiuhbao Sweetie’ is readily available.

**JUDGE LOVE**

The unanimous winner for “Best in Show” among the nine judges, this sumptuous phalaenopsis orchid demanded attention.

“My eyes were instantly drawn to it like it was a pelican beacon blinking,” said judge Debbie Remblence. The vice president of sales for David Austin Roses awarded ‘Jiuhbao Sweetie’ a perfect score for its form, functionality and color. “You just can’t top that intricacy,” she said. “It reminds me of a crowd of butterflies.”

‘Jiuhbao Sweetie’ was exactly what judge Steve Dionne, AAF, needs for his statement-seeking customers. The sales director for United Floral Exchange in Vista, Calif., also praised the orchid for its “architectural, cascading blooms that, from a distance, look electric.”

The contrast of ‘Jiuhbao Sweetie’s’ size and delicacy struck judge Diane Lagerstedt, sales manager at Washington Floral Service in Seattle.

“When you look at the white trim encircling the petals, it looks so graceful and gentle,” she said. “But when you back away, you’re punched with this powerful, hot pink color and enormity of each bloom. This is the biggest phalaenopsis you’ll ever see.”
Best in Class — Alstroemeria

OUTSTANDING TRAITS

JUDGE LOVE
“The alstroemeria were definitely the most difficult to judge,” said Jim Leider, AAF, CEO of Leider Horticultural Companies, Inc., in Buffalo Grove, Ill. “But the lush, dark foliage on ’Baby Doll’ made it stand out.” Robin Otani, co-owner of Northwest Wholesale Florists in Seattle echoed Leider’s praise, adding, “Alstroemeria can sometimes have a yellowish tinge, but these leaves — dark and shiny — just look healthy.”

Judge Karen Fountain, AAF, didn’t even need to see the variety name to know the target market for this precious named alstroemeria.

“Immediately, I thought: This is the perfect baby girl flower,” said the owner of Flowers ‘n’ Ferns in Burke, Va. She’s itching to get her hands on ’Baby Doll’ for those newborn orders she anticipates soon, as it’s been about nine months since the mid-Atlantic snowstorms. “Though adorable by itself, ’Baby Doll’ would provide a sophisticated pink offset to carnations, daisies and roses in bridal work,” Fountain said.

’Baby Doll’ earned additional kudos from Fountain for its long laterals, strong stem and large bloom size. “This is a really versatile flower,” she said. “It would make designers’ work simple for cluster arrangements, but looks stunning solo, too.”

Best in Class — Chrysanthemum

OUTSTANDING TRAITS
Uniform petals, heavy foliage and sturdy stem.

JUDGE LOVE
’Dark Green Anastasia’ first struck Otani for its marketability. “Customers are begging for anything green right now,” she said. Fountain added that the “dark green” is the perfect shade: “It’s slightly deeper than lime, which makes it usable year-round,” she said.

Judges applauded the chrysanthemum’s uniform petals, heavy foliage and straight, solid stem.

“This is not your ordinary football mum,” Leider said. “Its green eyes add a little zip. And the way the petals reach upward creates a very perky look.”

Fountain envisioned using ’Dark Green Anastasia’ as a complement to pink and yellow flowers or, for a high style, birds-of-paradise.

“I’d incorporate this in any Asian-influenced design,” said Susan Wilke, PFCI, of Karthaus & Sons Wholesale Florist in Franklin, Wis. Wilke highlighted attributes of ribbon-winners during in the Winner’s Circle session.
The magazine of the Society of American Florists (SAF)

Best in Class — Cut Bulb

OUTSTANDING TRAITS

“‘Paradero’ is not particularly branchy, which means it ships really well,” said Janet Louie, Green Valley’s sales manager, who entered this particular variety because of its compact foliage.

Its durable stem deserves recognition too, said Robin van der Schaaf, president of lily distributor Flamingo Holland in Vista, Calif., who introduced Louie to the Oriental variety.

JUDGE LOVE
“I’ve never examined lilies so thoroughly before,” said judge Mike Mellano, president of Mellano & Company in San Luis Rey, Calif., who said he struggled to find any flaws with ‘Paradero’.

“It isn’t exceptionally thick, but if you shake it, it won’t bend and the bulbs stay upright,” Mellano said. Cosentino agreed: “There’s nothing flimsy about this lily.”

The bloom placement and size marveled Dionne. “It creates a solid wall of hot pink, set off by the light green star in the center, a very trendy combination,” he said. “And ‘Paradero’ provides maximum showiness for an extended period of time because the primary, secondary and tertiary blooms open simultaneously.”

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**JUDGE LOVE**
The judges unanimously named modernity as this flower’s selling point.

“It’s extremely marketable,” Otani said. “It has a distinctive texture, the color’s very ‘in’ and it would take up significant space in an arrangement, allowing customers to stretch their budget.”

Bunched together, ‘Barbatus Green Ball’ would lend a contemporary look to a bridal bouquet in lieu of hydrangeas, Fountain said.

“It has a clean, fresh feel to it,” said Leider, daughter used ‘Barbatus Green Ball’ in a wedding this past summer.

Want to wow your brides with this variety? “Don’t call it a carnation,” said Jody Whitekus, technical manager of Golden Flowers. Raska agreed. “Society brides flinch at the word ‘carnation’,” he said. “But say ‘dianthus’ and they’ll consider it chic.”

He suggests gluing a few dendrobium orchids to bunches of ‘Barbatus Green Ball’ for a simple, but sleek hand-tied bouquet for attendants.

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**Best in Class — Gerbera**

**OUTSTANDING TRAITS**
A rarely seen light yellow color. High petal count. Thick, straight stems. Larger than average (10-12 centimeters).

Special Note: Supply is somewhat scarce, but ‘Enjoy’ will be readily available in 2011.

**JUDGE LOVE**
“I want to take this one home with me!” Otani said, gushing about ‘Enjoy’s’ flat face, compact petals and lemony color. “It actually looks like it’s smiling.”

Customers will be grinning, too, when they see the gerbera’s pale yellow color, Otani said.

‘Enjoy’s’ long, straight stem gives designers flexibility, Fountain said. “Gerberas tend to bend, so you usually have to manipulate them to make them work in an arrangement.”
Best in Class — Rose

**OUTSTANDING TRAITS**

**JUDGE LOVE**
“This is Audrey Hepburn classic,” Lagerstedt said, adding that it’s “practically perfect” for its color, petal count, stem and foliage.

Remblance said of ‘Corazon’, which means “heart” in Spanish. She gave high marks for the rose’s regal, velvet-like texture and symmetrical appearance. “You feel compelled to touch it, just to know it’s real,” she said. She also appreciated how consistently each petal folded back: “If you cut this in half, you would find no discrepancies,” she said.

By judge Rick Canale’s evaluation, Equiflor/Rio Roses “hit a homerun.” “It’s a true red, has a big head and opens beautifully,” said the owner of Exotic Flowers in Boston. “Consumers will love it.”

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Best in Class — Potted Flowering Plant

**OUTSTANDING TRAITS**
Lasts 8-12 weeks. Stands 24-26 inches tall. Sports sturdy, shiny, colorful foliage.

**JUDGE LOVE**
“Even a neophyte could tell this a superior plant,” Leider said. What makes the plant so obviously a winner are its dense, rigid foliage and saturated coloring.

Otani praised its full shape and red-orange color, “which makes it showy enough for event work, though I could definitely see this brightening up a home or office,” she said.
Best in Class — Spray Rose

OUTSTANDING TRAITS
A dark lavender with a little heat to it. Opens fully with nice length. Long laterals.

JUDGE LOVE
“The number of buds per stem bowled me over,” Lagerstedt said, praising the way those buds open fully and uniformly. Retailer Canale agreed: “You get a lot of bang for your buck with this variety,” he said. For prom work in particular, he’d reach for ‘Purple Sky’, as one stem easily yields two corsages and a boutonniere.

Though billed as purple, this spray rose also fits in the pink family, Lagerstedt said, enhancing its marketability.

Rembleance couldn’t stop cooing over ‘Purple Sky’. “It’s not about size; it’s what you do with it,” she said. “The buds on this spray are every bit as dramatic as roses twice as big.” The colors — “so natural” — earned her affection, as well. “Just look at those pistachio guard petals,” Rembleance said. “Could there be a more perfect complement to the sweet-heart pink bud?”

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‘COTE DE AZUR’ ALSTROEMERIA
GOLDEN FLOWERS

“This is a spectacular jewel tone with some of the sturdiest foliage I’ve ever seen on an alstroemeria,” Leider said. Its purple petals — popular year-round with brides — “would make a glamorous filler in a bouquet,” Fountain said.

‘NADIA’ ALSTROEMERIA
GOLDEN FLOWERS

“What a great red,” Fountain said, holding ‘Nadia’ next to a ‘Freedom’ rose, a near identical match. “I’ll be reaching for this for Christmas and Valentine’s Day arrangements and recommending it to brides who don’t have the budget for roses.”
The magazine of the Society of American Florists (SAF)

They Don’t Reserve Judgment

For a complete list of the companies that participated in the Outstanding Varieties competition, what they won and their contact information, go to www.safnow.org/moreonline. There, you’ll also find out more about the judges and what makes a variety outstanding.

The judges agreed that these entries shined for their strong stems, consistent petals and marketable colors, but they earned slightly lower scores than Liberty Blooms’ entry because they had smaller heads and a few imperfections in its foliage.

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‘HIMALAYA’ ALSTROEMERIA
FRESCA FARMS, GOLDEN FLOWERS

Both of these ‘Himalaya’ entries scored well for the caliber of their coloring, both in the petals and the foliage, judges said.

“Because its bloom size is phenomenal and those magenta and yellow accents are so striking, I would choose to let ‘Himalaya’ stand alone,” Fountain said. “A vase of these would be very calming and elegant for a sympathy order — and a great alternative for customers who are sensitive to lilies’ smell.”

‘SHAKIRA’ ALSTROEMERIA
GOLDEN FLOWERS

“This hue looks very fresh and youthful,” Otani said. Fountain agreed: “This yellow is soft — not neon or mustardy — so it exudes innocence,” she said. “I’d love to arrange this with some blue delphinium, irises and a few white daisies for a baby arrangement,” she said.

‘ANASTASIA’ CHRYSANTHEMUM AND ‘ANASTASIA DARK GREEN’ CHRYSANTHEMUM
FRESCA FARMS, SUNBURST FARMS

The judges agreed that these entries shined for their strong stems, consistent petals and marketable colors, but they earned slightly lower scores than Liberty Blooms’ entry because they had smaller heads and a few imperfections in its foliage.
“There’s so much versatility in this pure white flower,” Fountain said. “It could be graceful and somber in an all-white vase at a funeral, but it would also feel festive when paired with red carnations and roses for Christmas work.”

“This is a great choice for the moment,” Fountain said. Besides its fashionable color, ‘Country’ boasts an average of seven to eight blooms per stem, “so here’s a solution to stretch your budget.”

“This orange has a tangerine flavor to it that will drive customers wild,” Leider said. Its vibrancy makes it well suited for whimsical customers, Fountain added, “and its clear green center, as opposed to black, has the potential to pull out a host of colors in an arrangement.”

“No doubt: This will sell,” Otani said. “Customers crave deep orange, and this is a knockout with its flat face and strong stem.” But to give that dramatic color proper ado, pay attention to lighting, Leider said: “If you display this in a dark room, you lose its impact.”

“This gerbera gives a real pop of color,” Leider said. “It doesn’t matter the lighting or environment, ‘Pre-Intenzz’ will always jump out at you.”

“My personal favorite of all the gerberas, I cannot wait to get my hands on this,” Fountain said of the candy corn-colored variety. “The grower labeled it as a fall flower, but I would absolutely use this in the spring and summer, too. The yellow variegation makes ‘Souvenir’ really adaptable.”

“This just begs to be touched,” Otani said. “About half of our business comes from walk-in traffic and it’s a very tactile industry. Once customers feel how soft ‘Green Ball’ is, they’ll be sold on it.” Fountain said she will use ‘Green Ball’ to cover design mechanics, or she might just highlight its airiness with exotic accompaniments, such as anthurium, birds-of-paradise and heliconia.
“It’s perfect in every way,” said Canale, who considered ‘Snowflake’ second only to Best in Show winner, ‘Jiuhbao Sweetie’. “It’s a real, true white and the buds’ openings are just picturesque,” he said. ‘Snowflake’ would easily incorporate into designs thanks to significant laterals (6-10 inches long) and an average of six buds per stem, Lagerstedt and Remblence noted. “And don’t overlook those green guard petals,” Lagerstedt said. “They add a little interest — like a ruffled collar around the flower’s head.”

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Ribbon Royalty
Of the growers exhibiting, some left with more ribbons than a gym-full of pony-tailed cheerleaders. Here are those with biggest haul.

Golden Flowers: 2 Best in Class, 9 blue, 8 red
Fresca Farms: 1 Best in Class, 5 blue, 8 red
Esmeralda Farms: 1 blue, 12 red
Green Valley Floral: 1 Best in Class, 5 blue, 5 red
Sunburst Farms, Inc: 3 blue, 8 red