

## 2009 KIPS BAY DECORATOR SHOW HOUSE

# A show of (natural) force

BY DANNY SINOPOLI

It's rare for the Kips Bay Decorator Show House, one of New York's grandest home-design venues, to feature the work of even the most accomplished designers more than twice every half-decade.

Nonetheless, the yearly charity extravaganza's current incarnation in a 20,000-square-foot townhouse on Manhattan's Upper East Side features not one but two eye-popping spaces by Plant Specialists Inc., a Long Island-based indoor/outdoor landscaping firm co-owned by former Torontonian Grahame Hubbard.

The firm's appearance this year is its third since 2007.

"I'm not sure if they made a mistake or they really like us," Hubbard joked in a phone interview this week. "I would like to think it's the latter."

That wouldn't be an unsafe bet. In a year that includes room creations by such powerhouse designers as Bunny Williams, Charlotte Moss and Gloria Vanderbilt, the two spaces by Plant Specialists ([www.plantspecialists.com](http://www.plantspecialists.com)) more than hold their own.

In one, a narrow fifth-floor terrace enveloped by high walls and a long boxwood hedge, recycled-resin seating from Belgium, conical tree-inspired light fixtures by Spanish designer Joe Santacoloma and boxwood topiary in tall white planters contemporize a traditional metropolitan aerie.

In the other, a dramatic two-





**Boxy outdoor furniture and conical tree-like floor lamps distinguish Plant Specialists Inc.'s high-glam terrace design at New York's Kips Bay Decorator Show House.**

**FAR LEFT** In the ground-floor conservatory, the company installed a pair of 20-foot-tall palm trees for tropical-style wow factor. Toronto floral designer Bruno Duarte individually pinned up 3,000 handpainted feathers to create the dramatic 'butterfly swarm' on the walls.

storey garden room on the ground floor, moss-covered wall panels and a pair of 20-foot Christmas palms from Florida put an impressive spin on the idea of urban oases.

Together, the spaces provide a sumptuous picture of the options available to home owners when it comes to creating green spaces both indoors and out.

"It's a phenomenal project to be involved with because people actually come here for ideas," Hubbard says of the event, which this year, its 37th, includes designs by more than 30 well-known decorating pros.

Most, as per custom, are from the New York area, but

the talented outsider occasionally gets a foot in. To execute one of the most spectacular features of its indoor garden room, for instance, Plant Specialists flew down another Torontonionian, floral designer Bruno Duarte of Fresh Florals (www.freshflorals.com).

In collaboration with the space's chief designers, Philip Roche and Jacqueline Togneri, Duarte adorned the moss panels with more than 3,000 red and pink feather butterflies that float along the wall in a continuous, colourful swarm.

"They appear to fly out of a dogwood ball at one end of the room," giving the space "some movement, a nice

punch of colour," Duarte said.

Colour, of course, can take on many forms. In other areas of the Show House, everything from gas masks to baby pictures of CNN anchorman Anderson Cooper (whose mom is the legendary Vanderbilt) have been used to decorate rooms.

Clearly, visitors to this year's venue, which is also on the market for a reported \$75-million (U.S.), will have plenty of ideas to take home.

» *The Kips Bay Decorator Show House (www.kipsbay.org) will be open at 22 E. 71st St. in Manhattan through May 17. Admission is \$30; proceeds go to the Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club, a youth outreach organization in the Bronx.*