



JAPAN STUDY TOUR 2026

A Field Report for T5NP Subscribers

Kellee O'Reilly & Michael Bracken · International Garden Centre Association

YOUR
MARKET
METRICS
THE 5 NUMBERS
PROJECT
FOR GARDEN RETAILERS
Ian Baldwin



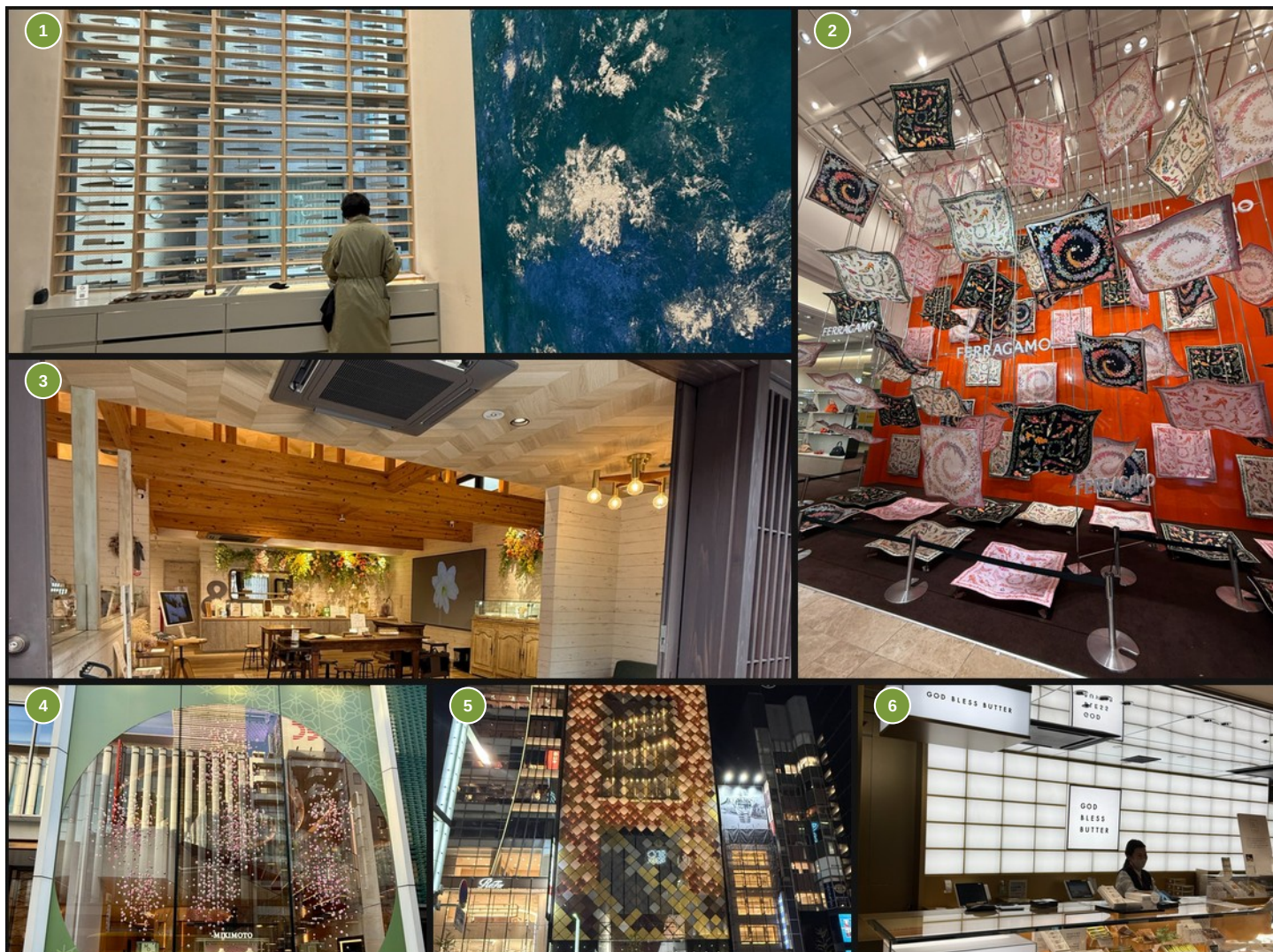
Hello YMM / T5NP Community friends!

In late March and early April 2026, we traveled to Japan as part of an International Garden Centre Association delegation with members from Europe, South Africa, and North America — visiting the **Tokyo metropolitan area** and **Kanazawa**. We wanted to share a small selection of photos, hoping it sparks ideas and plants a seed of wanderlust for you. Japan's relationship with nature — honoring it, elevating it, commercializing it with restraint and craft — is something every garden retailer would benefit from experiencing firsthand (and you'll get to, during the 2027 IGCA Congress, October 17–22, 2027 — mark your calendars!). Learn more at www.intgardencentre.org. For now, come see Japan through our eyes!

Kellee O'Reilly (Your MarketMetrics, Minneapolis MN)
& **Michael Bracken** (Nicholson-Hardie, Dallas TX) — **USA Representatives to IGCA**

Tokyo — World-Class Display

Tokyo is home to world-class retail of every kind — garden boutiques, fashion houses, artisan food stalls, and architectural landmarks — all united by an uncompromising commitment to presentation. Great merchandising is great merchandising, whether you're selling silk scarves or succulents. The point is to catch the buyer's eye and inspire!



1 Precision Knife Display — Tokyo Retail

Artisan knives displayed like sculpture against a serene blue wall. Tokyo's finest tools are treated like art — and priced accordingly. (Yes, one is now in my kitchen!)

2 Ferragamo — Silk Scarf Installation, Tokyo

Dozens of ornate silk scarves suspended mid-air against a vivid orange wall. Fashion houses know theatre sells.

3 Simply Elegant Wood Boutique Interior — Kanazawa

Warm woods and dramatic floral hanging designs plus a striking digital floral wall that continually bloomed/evolved within a 'make your own' jewelry boutique.

4 Mikimoto — Ginza Flagship Window

A three-story masterpiece in simple repeating pearl shapes, circle imagery, and a clever pink and green spring color story. Mikimoto invented the cultured pearl — and they display it like a national treasure.

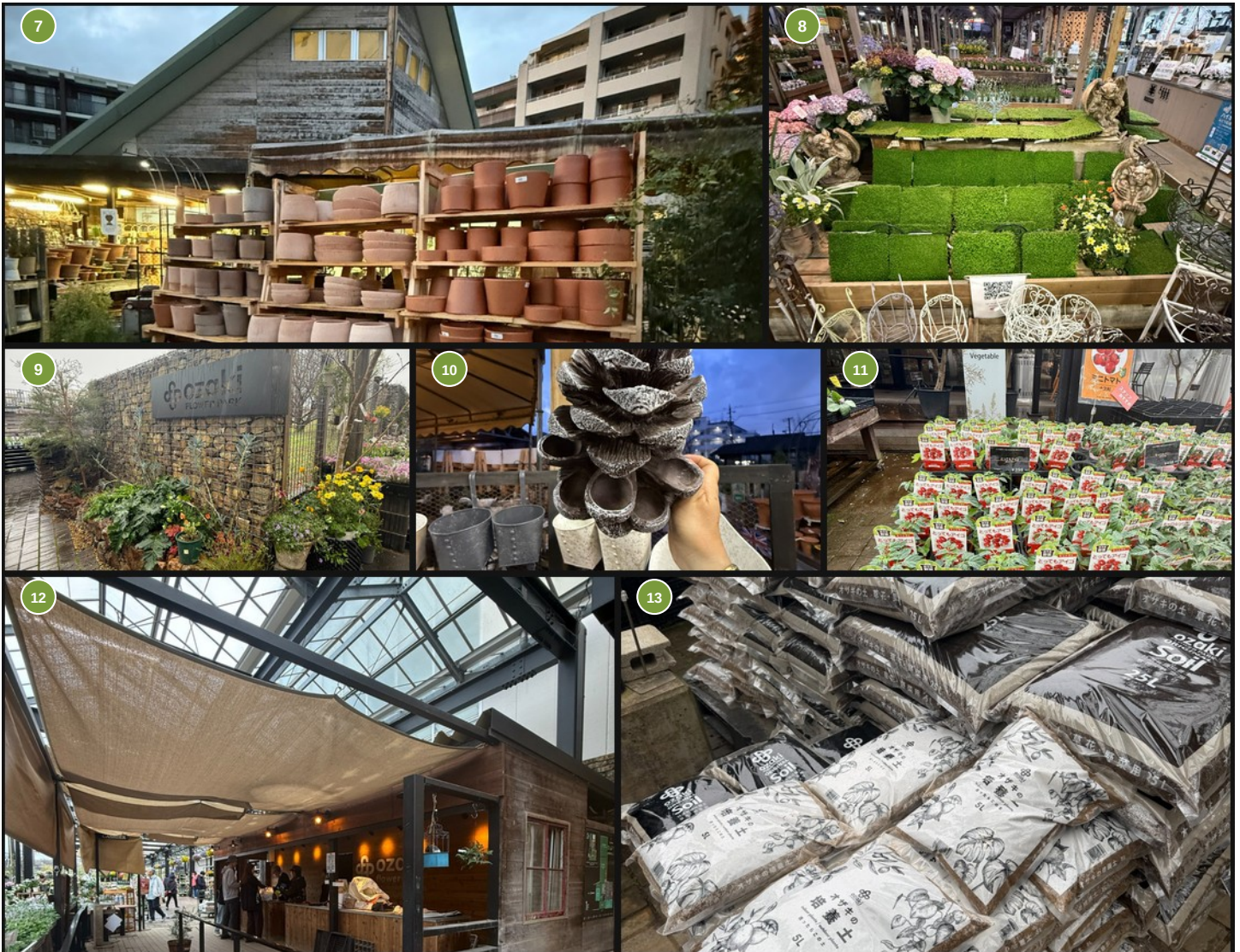
5 Yamaha Building — Ginza

The scale of Tokyo's commitment to design is awe-inspiring: a repeating simple square pattern sprawling across all ten vertical floors of the Yamaha building façade: architecture as brand statement.

6 'God Bless Butter' — Tokyo City Station

Simplicity reigns at this tiny basement stand. Three products only, celebrating butter cake/butter pie crust. (I know, I was skeptical too.) A stark, eye-catching display with ceiling mirrors that multiply the effect infinitely. (A 10-minute wait for the most delicious bite imaginable. Worth it! God bless butter, indeed!)

Garden Retail in Tokyo — Green Gallery & Ozaki Flower Park



7 Green Gallery Gardens — Pottery & Roofline

Terracotta pots stacked on rustic timber shelving beneath the dramatic A-frame roofline of Green Gallery — humble materials, striking composition.

8 Living Tiles

Tiered moss squares offered in a striking stacked display adjacent to the live fish department. Is moss an impulse buy? Maybe!

9 Ozaki Flower Park — Gabion Wall Entrance

A dramatic stone-filled gabion wall with the Ozaki logo — strong destination branding right at the threshold in rustic but modern interpretation.

The Impulse-Stop Pinecone — Green Gallery

An oversized cast pinecone 'feeder' / decorative — there were many clustered together and hanging from the ceiling — an unexpected product that stops customers cold and would have easily ended up in my cart if I had a bigger suitcase!

11 Cherry Tomato Starter Plants — Ozaki

Selling the dream when you can only see green leaves: 'grow your own' sells better when it looks irresistible (and unmistakeable!) from the start.

12 The Rustic-Refined Checkout Pavilion

A warm barn-like structure within a glass-roofed hall — brings down the scale of the high greenhouse roof and makes it less 'cold' / more inviting.

13 Ozaki Own-Brand Soil Packaging

Commodity products + private label presentation — Loved the clear poly bag, simple black + white imagery. It's giving 'upscale' even though it's just a bag of sand!

Ozaki Small Treasures & Aoyama Flower Market

From impulse-buy houseplants priced under \$10 to an evening reception where food displays looked like living art — Tokyo consistently demonstrated that beauty in retail is not optional. It is the strategy.



Hydro-Culture Pitcher Plant — ¥980 (~\$6.50)

- 13 Soil-free, self-contained, and irresistibly cute — the 'Hydro Culture' sign stake tells the whole story. The impulse product that quietly drives basket size without a word of selling. How can you add small elements throughout your offering that make it easy to turn browsers into buyers?

Hydro Globe Display

- 14 Glass orb vessels with colored rock make everyday plants feel special and giftable. Small charming treasures at appealing 'don't think, just grab it' price points.

SUSTEE Water Monitor — Cabinotier

- 15 One of the trip hosts was Cabinotier, maker of this clever and simple wicking moisture monitor — helping less-confident 'plant parents' quickly answer the question: 'Is my plant thirsty?' Brilliant, simple, giftable.

Aoyama Flower Market at Night

- 16 A glowing, plant-filled two-story glass façade that draws you in like a living terrarium, with 2nd floor showcased as a backlit 'billboard' — not an afterthought!

Evening Reception: Food as Living Art

- 17 Our reception featured food woven into blooms, foliage, and glass cloches — a tableau that erased the boundary between florist and fine dining. The centerpiece was a more-than-8' tall urn of blooming cherry blossom branches: stunning!

Tree Trunk Display Shelving — Aoyama

- 18 Innovative shelving framed by raw tree trunk uprights creates a striking contrast of rustic wood and modern glass/metal — nature as architecture, product as art.

Aoyama Interior — Cascading Greenery Ceiling

- 19 Trailing plants tumble from ceiling-mounted rails over curated shelves of color blocked ceramics and lifestyle goods. Visual merchandising as pure theatre.

Aoyama Flower Market & Takayama Gateway Station

From Tokyo's most artful flower café to a mountain-town boutique where fresh flowers are sold like fine art — every stop reinforced the same truth: presentation is the product.



- 20 'Lapel' Sculptural Woven Vases — Aoyama**
Functional objects elevated to collectible art in a full rainbow of colors. (Material is 'floppy hat' woven fiber.) Priced from ¥7,920+ (~\$53+).
- 21 The Hiuchi Ceramic Collection on Live-Edge Burl**
This display of hand-thrown ceramics on a 15-foot burl wood cross section multi-layer display table. Looked more like a museum than a shop!
- 22 Nicolai Bergmann — The Gallery Shelf Wall**
Cubed oak shelving showcases pink sculptural floral arrangements — each cell its own spotlight vignette, priced like fine art. (One of many color blocked displays.)
- 23 Craft at the Counter — Nicolai Bergmann**
An artisan florist hand-composes a signature box arrangement at point-of-sale — silent selling executed to perfection.
- 24 The Candle Bundle — ¥21,560 (~\$150)**
A preserved flower box paired with a 'Posie' soy candle — a cross-category gift bundle that elevates both products and justifies a luxury price point.
- Takayama Gateway — Stone Garden Nook**
25 A sculpted seating nook canopied by twisting branches and glowing amber light in a glass-enclosed urban garden on the 28th floor 'garden' at Takayama Gateway Station: Nature, architecture, and art intertwined throughout this impossible-to-capture in photos full-floor immersive horticultural showcase.

Kanazawa — Tradition, Gardens & Gastronomy

We took a bullet train 3 hours to Kanazawa — a much smaller (500k people) city where the authentic Edo period culture is still visible on the city streets. These final stops offered the deepest immersion in Japanese tradition, craft, and hospitality.



- 26 Chef Shinichiro Takagi at ZENIYA**
 Michelin-starred 2nd gen Chef Takagi presents a course at his celebrated Kanazawa restaurant: refinement, warmth, and impeccable craft in perfect balance.
- 27 Geisha Suzu Under the Cherry Blossoms**
 Our traditionally trained geisha Suzu, whose name means "Happy Beautiful" — beneath her glowing lantern in the Kazue-machi district near the Asanogawa river.
- 28 Warm Hospitality, Bridging Language Barriers**
 Michael, Suzu, Kellee, and our generous host, Shuichi-san, outside a Kazue-machi teahouse (Photo by our friend / his daughter Masumi, of the JGCA cmte) .
- 29 Ming Dynasty Porcelain**
 A humble tofu ball elevated to melt-in-mouth perfection on family heirloom porcelain. Meal also featured delicacy of firefly squid (initially presented still swimming!)
- 30 Japan's First Fountain — Kenroku-en**
 Powered by natural pressure difference between the garden's ponds. No pumps, no electricity — 19th-century engineering genius.
- 31 Ancient Waterfall, Kenroku-en**
 Every stone, every tree, every trickle of water placed with centuries of careful intention.
- 32 Lord Maeda Statue, Kenroku-en**
 The feudal lord who commissioned this garden as his private retreat in the 17th century overlooks it still.

The Delegation — Before & After



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Day One — Cherry Blossom Garden

IGCA delegates from across North America, Europe, and South Africa gather beneath full sakura bloom. We arrived as strangers from different countries ...



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Final Evening — La Vista Tokyo Bay Hotel

... and left as friends in matching pajamas! (Standard hotel-issue 'house clothes' worn proudly to the bar, the restaurant, and the public baths.)

Our Top 10 Cultural Observations

Beyond the beautiful photos, we came home with observations that have direct relevance to how we think about garden retail in North America — and about life more broadly.

1. Presentation IS the Product

How we display is as important as what we sell. In every setting we visited, presentation elevated the product's perceived worth dramatically.

2. Restraint Creates Desire

Crowded displays reduce desire. Curated displays create it. Strategic empty space made us want things we didn't know we needed.

3. Craftsmanship Commands Premium Pricing

The hang tag and the label are not optional extras — they are the justification for premium pricing. Customers pay more when they understand why.

4. Nature is Honored, Not Just Sold

Japan treats plants and flowers with genuine reverence. Are we communicating the emotional value of what we sell — or just the price?

5. Hospitality is a Competitive Strategy

Hospitality in Japan is not a training module. It is a deeply held cultural value. Deep and authentic gratitude for every interaction was pervasive, and powerful. (We bowed, A LOT: "Arigatou gozaimasu.") The experience we create may matter more than any product we sell.

6. Warmth Transcends Language

Everyone had Google Translate at the ready. Connection doesn't require a shared vocabulary — it requires willingness and a smartphone.

7. Scale and Serenity — Tokyo's Contradiction

40+ million people, and yet stunningly immaculate and amazingly QUIET. No public trash cans — people carry their own waste home. What would our stores look like held to that standard?

8. Cleanliness as Cultural Art Form

Japanese public bathing culture — the onsen — is a centuries-old social institution. And yes: high-tech Japanese toilets absolutely live up to the hype. Experience it yourself.

9. 'House Clothes' — Hotel Genius

Matching loungewear provided at check-in, worn everywhere — bar, restaurant, public baths. This small traditional custom makes it easy for business professionals to travel light but be comfortable.

10. The World is Smaller — and Richer — Than We Think

Our love of growing things and belief in the power of plants to improve people's lives are values shared across every culture we encountered. The IGCA exists to cultivate those connections.

IN CLOSING ... We hope you've enjoyed this trip report as a break from your normal Spring routine — thank you for being part of the YMM / T5NP community. We appreciate the opportunity to represent the very best of America to the rest of the world. We hope you'll consider joining us this summer in Munich or next year in Japan! Until then — the world gets smaller with every trip outside your zip code: continued curiosity will keep us all growing! Questions or reflections? kellee@yourmarketmetrics.com