

The 2006 AGA Convention

Jay Luto photographs by the author

The 2006 Aquatic Gardeners Association (AGA) Convention was hosted by the San Francisco Bay Area Aquatic Plant Society (SFBAAPS), which, founded in 1998, is second only to the AGA for the title of longest-running dedicated aquarium gardening group in the United States. My West Coast journey began on Thursday morning with a bag full of camera equipment, a map of San Francisco, two friends, and a rental car.

Leaving our hotel relatively early, we had plenty of time to visit some of San Francisco's famous locations. The beauty of the Golden Gate Bridge, the historic waterfront of Fisherman's Wharf, and the city's unique architecture made this day unforgettable from a photographer's perspective.



■ The Iron Aquascaper Competition judges (from left to right: Ole Pederson, Dorothy Reimer, and Troels Andersen) evaluate one of the layouts.

My official AGA journey began with a visit to a very impressive fish store, Aqua Forest, which is a premier source of high-tech planted aquarium products in the Bay Area, including sintered glass diffusers, lighting, tanks, substrate, media, rocks, driftwood, and fertilizers. We also visited a store called Albany Aquarium, a leading supplier of exotic aquatic plants in the Bay Area.

The official convention kick-off began on early Friday morning with a field trip and special behind-the-scenes access to the nationally acclaimed Monterey Bay

Aquarium, which features nearly 200 award-winning galleries and exhibits. Among other attractions, we watched delicate jellies pulsing and drifting through the largest exhibits of their kind in the



■ George Lo from AquaForest picks out plants for the Iron Aquascaper Competition while members of the opposing team, Aquarium Design Group's Jeff Senske (right) and Shannon Rice (left), look on.

world; a million-gallon exhibit with sea turtles, tunas, sharks, and barracudas; and a "splash zone" with penguins and hands-on activities.

Friday evening, after brief introductions, the presentations began with a couple of interesting sessions from two well-known hobbyists and personal friends of mine. Eric Do spoke about a fast-growing area of the aquatic plant hobby, freshwater invertebrates, sharing his personal experiences with keeping crayfish, shrimps, and snails. The topic of aquarium photography was covered by author, aquascaper, and co-founder of Aquarium Design Group (ADG) Jeff Senske, who talked about digital photography, camera settings, lighting control, composition, and editing tips.

Saturday's schedule was booked solid with national and international speakers. Dorothy Reimer, who has been in the hobby for over 41 years, began with "Basic Growing and Keeping Live Plants," outlining her low-tech approach to growing plants. Next in line was a PhD graduate from Denmark, Troels Andersen, who spoke on "Plants' Acclimation to Life Under Water." Based on his fieldwork and review of the scientific literature,

he focused on how plants acclimate morphologically and physiologically to the aquatic environment.

Ricky Cain gave a well-received presentation called "The Inspiration" on easily recognized aquascapes from around the world, and George Batten provided a research scientist's view of "Chemistry and the Planted Aquarium." The presentation portion of the day ended with another guest speaker from Denmark, Ole Pederson, PhD, whose talk "Aquascaping the Natural Way" focused on natural aquascapes, with examples of aquatic plant habitats across the globe.

In addition to the banquet, announcements, and presentation of the AGA Aquascaping Contest winners that have marked the official end to Saturday's activities for the past few years, this year the



■ Larry Lampert, here seen in the role of convention auctioneer, was announced as the new AGA President.

SFBAAPS presented a new event—the Iron Aquascaper Challenge. Two pre-selected teams (from ADG and Aqua Forest) tested their knowledge, skills, and imagination by aquascaping an aquarium within a set amount of time. I can easily see this challenge becoming an official ending to future AGA conventions.

Sadly, Sunday came too quickly, and after the official AGA auction, a T-shirt purchase, and some quick goodbyes, it was time for the plane ride back to New Jersey. Thanks to SFBAAPS and AGA for another well-organized and very enjoyable convention! 🐠