

It is so encouraging to see the many excellent award descriptions currently being filed with the Cambridge office. Improved considerably over the past several years, these “better” award descriptions can be found in every judging center report although, alas, as yet they are still somewhat sporadic. Strangely enough, excellent award descriptions, at least from this writer’s viewpoint, will arrive from the same judging center cheek to jowl (or misplaced modifier to dangling participle) with ones which might as well be discussing blue-ribbon dahlias for all the pertinent information a demanding reader can glean from them. Although you may quite rightly feel that this subject of appropriate award descriptions has been done to death, the menacing fact remains that with an imperfectly written record of our judgments, the judgments themselves vanish with our memories. All that remains is a little symbol on a label, inarticulate and relatively meaningless. With a highly sophisticated written record of our judgments, that symbol becomes saturated with meaning and historical perspective. The awards records then become, not a disconnected précis of isolated judgments, but a comparative picture of a continually evolving, subtly changing awards system.

Concerning the mechanics of award descriptions: although the *Handbook on Judging and Exhibition, Sixth Edition*, goes into little detail concerning the nature of award descriptions or how they are created, it has long been the understood custom in many judging centers that the award descriptions are written by accredited judges. In actuality, however, award descriptions are being written by student, probationary and accredited judges. This is not necessarily a detrimental routine, for the writing of an award description can certainly aid in the training of both student judges and probationary judges, provided that their work is carefully reviewed at each judging session by appropriate accredited judges.

The important points to consider are three in number: **one**, whoever is selected at any given judging to create the award description should be a person recognized for his or her ability with language. A good judge is not necessarily also a good writer, and it is imperative that the writer of an award description be a person of both proven writing ability and judging experience. **Two**, however excellent the chosen person may prove to be, isn’t it wisest to have each award description reviewed by the judging panel *at the time* of the judging? In this fashion, judgments still fresh in mind may be placed side by side with the description of them, for the approval of the panel. It serves little purpose to have descriptions reviewed and possibly rewritten weeks after the judging when the Chairman is compiling the appropriate summary sheets for mailing to the Cambridge office. And **three**, should we not re-examine the position of the award description within the total judging process? More often in the past than any of us might care to admit, award descriptions have been an afterthought, a necessary drudgery to get through after the excitement of the actual judging. The usefulness of the descriptions has often reflected this attitude. This can be easily changed, if we view the writing of each award description as the final, creative aspect of judging an orchid. To be able, in the future, to

point to an award description appearing in the Awards Quarterly, originating from a judging in which you participated, and to know that it does indeed contain the essence of that judgment, would be something to be very proud of. It would be like a gift to future judges!

There are many award descriptions published today of which the writers, and judges involved in reviewing the descriptions, can be justly proud. Particularly noteworthy in this writer's estimation are those for *Epidendrum parkinsonianum* 'Las Lomas', CCM/AOS (page 192) and *Stanhopea tigrina* 'LaVerne', CCM/AOS (page 196), color illustrations of which appear within this issue's centerspread. In the case of *Epidendrum parkinsonianum* 'Las Lomas', whose C.C.M. was awarded to the exhibitor despite the historical of other exhibitors of more floriferous clones accorded the same award, the writer very clearly recorded the judges' determination that certain qualities other than floriferousness were so outstanding that the requirements for a C.C.M., at the point-score level designated, were obviously present. Had this notation been absent from the description, it is quite conceivable that future judges might have simply compared the number of flowers of the 'Las Lomas' clone to those of previously published awards, or of the clone to those of previously published awards, or of the clone they were assessing, and assumed, from lack of historical evidence, that the 'Las Lomas' award was a little out-of-kilter, based on number of flowers alone. In addition, the 'Las Lomas' award description once and for all points out that other characteristics of the C.C.M. award can and should, in certain instances, weight as heavily — even sometimes more heavily — than sheer quantity of bloom.

Within the award description for *Stanhopea tigrina* 'LaVerne', CCM/AOS, the volatile question of tailoring cultural award requirements to environmental limitations is addressed. From the description, it is quite clear that, while the judges admired the achievement of culturing this species to this degree of excellence within a theoretically adverse climate, the clone was compared, without hedging, to other same or similar species grown in theoretically more favorable environmental circumstances. This is as the *Handbook on Judging and Exhibition* requires. On the other hand, while the final point score remains unaffected by any reflection on the limitations imposed by environment on the 'LaVerne' clone, it is fascinating to present judges — and will prove stimulating to future judges — to realize that **1)** the question of conscious or subconscious adjustments of judgment to a realization of how and where a plant was grown will always be with us and must always be addressed; and that **2)** the judgment of the 'LaVerne' clone had to have proven extremely complex to accomplish in so far as the realization of a triumph over environmental limitations had to be acknowledged yet not allowed to assume any inappropriate influence in the assessment of cultural expertise as it is now defined within the present standards for the Certificate of Cultural Merit.

All of the plants illustrated on the front cover of this issue and within the centerspread received Certificates of Cultural Merit for their exhibitors. It might prove an interesting exercise to compare the award descriptions for these plants, not to isolate inadequacies per se, but to assist in the creation of better descriptions in the future. One of the very lovely plants whose description, alas, does it little merit, particularly were the illustration

lacking, is *Oncidium lanceanum* ‘Susan’, CCM/AOS (page 196). This is a typical C.C.M. award description of the past: number of flowers and buds, number of inflorescences, size of flower. These facts apparently are to be sufficient explanation for an award which, judging from the illustration, certainly appears most deserved. Yet the award description treats this fine achievement somewhat cavalierly in that nowhere within the phrases do we find any evidence of any judgment having been made. We see only numerical notations. These numerical aspects obviously provoked a range of responses within the judges; otherwise, an award would not have resulted. This range of responses, if articulated within the award description, would have added flesh to the skeleton — judgment, to the process of addition. The description for the ‘Susan’ clone is far from unique within this issue. The award description for *Encyclia citrine* ‘Delmar’, CCM/AOS operate on the same level. With an 86-point C.C.M., and a beautiful plant, but a description comprised almost solely of numbers, this writer was left with a sense of unfulfillment, a desire to learn what the judges were thinking as they eventually agreed to grant a cultural award of considerable weight. So too with the descriptions for *Cypripedium calceolus* ‘Phillip’, CCM/AOS (how often do we see North American terrestrial species awarded cultural awards and to what degree did the judges bring this aspect to bear upon their judging the ‘Phillip’ clone?); for *Masdevallia veitchiana* ‘Sol’, CCM/AOS (is the adjective “well-grown” truly connotative of the judgment response behind a score of the magnitude of 88 points?); or for *Dendrobium densiflorum* ‘Midas’, CCM/AOS (what position in the long parade of cultural specimens of *Dendrobium densiflorum* does the ‘Midas’ clone hold in comparative terms?)

No award description will ever reach the thoroughness we might ideally seek. After all, they are not only limited by the writer’s use of language but by necessary brevity of expression. Nevertheless, so many fine and expressive, modern award descriptions being produced from every judging center simply illuminate the need to make every award description as creative and deeply thought through as our judgments — and also clearly underscore the fact that we can do it, if we want to.